

Notes for Sir Stafford Cripps' Speech to
be delivered at Mountain Ash, S. Wales on
Sunday, June 14 at 7.30 p.m.

I am most grateful to the miners for giving me this opportunity to visit the South Wales coal fields after so long an absence. I have so often enjoyed your hospitality in the past and have done so much work with and for the miners that it is a pleasure to refresh myself once again with their enthusiasm.

To-day that enthusiasm is being expressed for the cause of the United Nations, the common cause of the free peoples of the world. I have had the privilege of sending a message for this occasion over the wireless to our gallant Allies in China and I know that you would send with my words your wishes for their common victory with us in the great world struggle that the United Nations are waging against the aggression and domination of the Axis powers.

The miners of Great Britain have always been in the forefront of the political struggle for the working class and have been the keenest and most active fighters for better social conditions, not only because their own conditions of living and of employment have been so undeservedly bad in the past, but also because they took a forward political view of the economic situation for the whole country. I have always felt a great bond of fellowship with them because of this attitude and outlook.

In the past when I have spoken in your Valleys I have come as a propagandist, and as one wishing to enlist your strength and support for the causes in which we both believe. To-day I come to you as a member of the National Government and not for the time being as an independent politician. I should like, therefore, to say a word to you as to my present political attitude since I believe you will be prepared to give it your support and confidence just as you did in the past under conditions which may have then appeared to be more difficult, but which were in fact easier than those of to-day.

There is in these critical times an overriding duty upon every man and woman in our country who cares for the future of our civilisation to accomplish the defeat of Hitler and his associates as speedily and as effectively as possible. To achieve that end we must sink all other interests and to it we must subordinate temporarily all our political objectives except in so far as they are themselves essential to increase the war effort. Whatever we believe to be essential for that purpose we must press with all our strength and power.

Neither you nor I will abandon our political beliefs or aims but we must, as the price of common action with our fellow citizens who hold other views, concentrate upon the immediate essentials for victory leaving over until such time as we have finally defeated the menace of Fascist domination in the world any internal political struggles by which we may hope to reach our ultimate social and economic objectives.

Everyone in the country to-day believes that national unity is essential for victory. Such a unity can be attained either through suppression or by agreement. We hold by our democratic faith, and have therefore chosen, the method of agreement. Our enemies have chosen that of suppression. Time will show that the unity of Democracy is more resistant, tougher, and in the long run more resilient. It may not perhaps appear on the surface to have the slick efficiency of totalitarian organisation, but because it is in its essence based upon the voluntary consent of the people it will not crack and break as one of these days we shall see the compulsory unity of the Nazi Regime suddenly give way under the burden of its own brutalities.

But this agreement for national unity entails that all political parties, and not one Party only, must be prepared for the time being to modify their policies. That is in fact what is happening in the Government whenever we find ourselves faced with a problem on which our fundamental political ideas differ.

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But there is one thing, and it is the vital thing, upon which all of us are agreed: that no private or vested interest should be allowed to stand in the way of the national effort for victory. If such an agreement were ever departed from it would obviously be impossible to preserve the national unity which we have so successfully achieved.

Let me now come to deal with a matter which is of course of particular interest to you as producers of coal. I need hardly stress the supreme importance of the work which you undertake. The fact that the Government have sent back men from the Army, the Air Force and the munitions industries to the pits is sufficient evidence, if any were required, of the national importance of mining. You who provide for the nation the coal which is basic to its whole industrial output have as great a responsibility for winning the war as have the soldiers in Libya or the gallant airmen who flew over Cologne. Your job is perhaps less spectacular, but I know well that the work which you are doing is far harder and more dangerous than that of many millions of others in our country who are likewise contributing to the war effort.

One cannot to-day make comparison between the contribution made to the war by one category of citizens and by another. Each is doing, or should be doing, their best in the task to which they have been set by the country. The only competition between them should be the socialist competition of seeing who can do the most to help the nation and to bring about the most rapid defeat of that greatest enemy of the working class - Adolf Hitler. It is such a spirit of brave competition and courageous selflessness which has made our comrades in the Soviet Union the admiration of the world.

But if all are equally serving their country in different fields, then we in the Government must do our best to see that all are treated equitably by the country. As you will know, I am fully conscious that the miners have felt in the past that their case for equitable treatment has not received the response from the community which it deserved. I myself have taken part in the effort to stress the hardships and inequalities which have fallen to their lot and to seek their redress.

One of the most encouraging features of the recent debate upon the coal situation in the House of Commons was the almost universal recognition by Members of all parties that something must be done to improve the miners' situation, and it was because of that recognition that the House of Commons passed practically unanimously the Government's Coal Scheme. That Scheme does not pretend to bring about the permanent or total nationalisation of the coal industry: that is a political decision which will have to be taken by Parliament when the time of political truce has passed. But the Government has expressly stated in its Scheme that the new system of organisation of the industry will be carried on until Parliament itself comes to some fresh decision as to how the industry is to be conducted. There will be no sudden reversal as there was after the last war.

The problem with which we were concerned at this critical juncture of the war was the urgent and very practical problem of how to get sufficient coal raised to the surface to maintain our industrial output for the war and to provide for the reasonable domestic needs of the people. The Government has not dealt with this problem by attempting to employ any single nostrum. It has considered the problem in its entirety and bearing in mind that a most essential part of the problem is the contentment and the conditions of the mine workers. The question really divides itself into two parts. Firstly that of manpower and secondly the technique of production so as to make the manpower fully effective.

With regard to manpower we were faced with the position that there is no possibility of getting back into the pits any more men from the Services or from the munition industries, bearing in mind that we must do, in the military field, all that the militant spirit of the British people demands that we should do to aid our Russian comrades and to fight Hitler on the continent of Europe. We must therefore do our utmost to conserve our existing manpower and to make the conditions in the pits such that the boys and young men will enter the industry gladly and cheerfully to play their part in winning the war.

We have set up a Committee, which we hope will report very shortly, to advise us as to how best we can improve the conditions of young entrants to the pits.

We are also organising a scheme of medical assistance and advice for all those engaged in the industry, which will enable them to enjoy the best possible curative treatments so that they may work in the best conditions of health. These new arrangements will inevitably take a little time before they can be brought into operation, but we are determined to press them forward with all the speed possible.

A great deal was said in the course of the debate in the House of Commons about the need for goodwill in the industry, but, as I ventured to point out to the House of Commons, goodwill is not a sentiment which exists apart from the conditions in the industry. The only effective way of creating contentment in the miner is that he should be satisfied that he is receiving just and fair treatment for the part that he is playing in the great national army that is fighting against Hitler.

Perhaps, first under this heading, comes the question of wages. We were approached by both sides of the industry as they had been unable to agree and with their consent we have set up the strongest and ablest arbitral tribunal that has ever considered this question, which will report within the next few days upon the immediate demands which the miners have put forward, and on the basis of that report the Government will arrive at its decision. But this is only a first and a temporary step.

We are asking this same tribunal to continue its work and to advise us upon the setting up of a permanent national machinery by which in future all wages questions in the mining industry can be dealt with fairly and speedily. These are important steps. They will satisfy the long expressed demand of the miners for national machinery, and once a satisfactory and permanent national machine is put into operation I have great hopes that it will be able to do much to overcome the bitter antagonisms of the past and to bring a spirit of contentment into the industry. But there are other and equally important aspects of this question.

Every intelligent man desires that full use should be made of his intelligence and experience in the conduct of his own industry. This is indeed an essential demand of any educated and intelligent democracy and must be one of the objectives which our post-war planners must have in view if we are to make the most of the industrial efforts of our people after the war. Every man should have the opportunity to make his contribution, be it small or be it great, in the production field and to see that his labour is not being avoidably wasted through bad organisation or failure to adopt the best methods of production.

It is our desire that from now on no man's work shall be wasted in the mining industry where that waste can be avoided through the application of the knowledge and experience either of the technicians, managers or workers. To this end the Government has decided to take over the complete and absolute operational control of every pit in the country. The pit managers, for whose qualifications and care in mining operations I have a high regard, will in future take their orders upon all mining matters from the Regional Government Controller acting under the new Minister of Fuel and Power - Major Gwilym Lloyd George - who possesses many high qualities for this post and is in addition a Welshman.

The Government through Parliament will bear the responsibility for seeing that everything is done to produce the maximum amount of coal possible. Some people have suggested that under the Scheme the managers may try to evade their obligation to obey the Controllers' orders. I do not believe that this will be so: I am confident that as a body the managers will come into this Scheme with every desire and intention to do their utmost for the coal production. But if any manager should be so obstructive, then the Controller can deal with him by dismissal. The Government intend, and let there be no doubt as to this, that the whole operation of mining in this country shall be under their control and shall be carried out in accordance with their orders. The miners can therefore be satisfied that the sole interest in which they will be working will be the interest of the national production of coal, and every effort will be made to see that none of the labour which they expend is wasted.

Now let me deal with the way in which the miners are to make their contribution of experience and knowledge in all the matters, many of them highly

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technical, which are entailed in the production of coal.

Firstly we intend the Pit Production Committees to be in reality what their name proclaims them to be. We are going to remove from them the disciplining of absentees, since we wish them to operate as production committees and not as courts of punishment. On those Pit Production Committees we want the management to have the advantage of the fullest advice and help from the miners in production, and the Minister of Fuel and Power will see to it through his Controllers that the Pit Production Committees are so operated as to produce this result. Then in each Region there will be a Regional Board to advise the Controller, upon which the miners will be fully represented, and where they will have an opportunity on a broader scale than is possible in the Pit Committees of making their contribution to the productive effort.

Finally, at the Centre there will be a National Board upon which the miners will similarly be represented and which will advise the Controller General and the Minister upon the national problems of production and allocation of coal.

Thus it will be seen that at every stage in the organisation we are going to take advantage of the knowledge and experience of the workers in the pit, and alongside them I am sure that we shall find technicians and managers who will be anxious to contribute their best to a concerted national effort. Never before have the miners been invited to take so large a part in the running of their own industry, and I am confident that once given this opportunity they will prove to any who may doubt it the enormous value of their participation.

It is because we believe that this new organisation of the industry in which so large a part is to be played by the miners themselves can bring about a marked increase in our production that we have temporarily put on one side the rationing of domestic coal. But nevertheless we are going to make immediate preparation for the introduction of a rationing system so that we may be fully prepared should the circumstances demand its imposition.

This Scheme, brought into being because of the circumstances of the war, is when viewed as a whole unquestionably the greatest step forward ever taken in the mining industry of this country. Even if it does not go quite so far as you, or perhaps as I, would like it to go it does, I believe, provide such new conditions for the control and organisation of mining as to give us firm hopes of a better and more smoothly run industry, with all that that may mean in production.

I have already told you that we have not attempted to lay down any conditions for the running of the industry after the war. That is a matter which will be left to Parliament to decide when the time comes. But I would like to make this observation. The reason why many of us in the past have stressed the need for nationalisation of the industry is because we believed that the mining operations should be run solely in the interest of obtaining the maximum output for the community, consistent with good working conditions for the miners, and also that we desired a much greater participation of the miners themselves in the conduct of their own industry. By the Government Scheme both these objectives are obtained. Whether or not they are sufficiently obtained, and how effective they can be in producing the desired result will be judged when Parliament has to decide upon the future - very largely upon the experience of the working of this present Scheme.

If it proves successful, it will then have established the truth of the two propositions which I have put forward, and its permanence - or the application of some more extensive form of control - will be far more likely if the miners now prove the success of the present Scheme. I myself profoundly hope that the present scheme will produce the improved result in the industry for which we look.

I have, as you know, always believed that the only eventual solution of this problem must be by a complete nationalisation of the Coal Industry. I am still convinced that after the war it will be essential for the country to have this wide measure of control over the Industry. That is a matter for future decision by Parliament and when the time comes I shall certainly strive my utmost to see that the right decision is come to.

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But in the meanwhile the more the miners do to make this Scheme a success and to increase production under it, the better will be the arguments in favour of that fuller measure of nationalisation in which you and I believe.

Before I leave this question of coal, let me say one word as to absenteeism. A great deal of exaggerated nonsense has been talked on this topic, as the Government stated in their White Paper upon the most reliable information which was before them. The miners as a whole have worked magnificently, but in every flock there will be found a few black sheep, and the whiter the bulk of the sheep in the flock the darker the black sheep look.

It is up to you as miners to make the few careless and irresponsible workers realise that any avoidable loss in our coal output to-day is not merely a matter affecting a particular pit, or even the mining industry as a whole, but is a gift to our enemies. We must not let the proud record of the miners of Great Britain be besmirched even by a handful of careless individuals who cannot understand the urgent and pressing need for coal as one of the main munitions of war with which to drive brutal Nazism from Europe.

There is one other special topic with which I feel I must deal this evening. I am sure that hundreds of thousands of people in South Wales, as indeed millions throughout the country, were thrilled by the news on Thursday night that a Treaty had been signed between this country and the Soviet Union not only reaffirming our mutual assistance to one another during the war but also binding us to act together in the post-war period. The visit of M. Molotov to this country did something which could never have been accomplished in Moscow. It enabled him to meet the Prime Minister and all the members of the War Cabinet and to realise how whole-hearted was our desire to co-operate on a friendly and equal basis with the Soviet Union after the war.

The four main actors in this great scene were the Prime Minister, Mr. Eden, M. Molotov and M. Maisky. To all four of them a debt of gratitude is due from all the free peoples of the world. For by their understanding and mutual confidence they have brought into being not only an historic document, but also a relationship between two great countries in the world which must play a very great part in the reconstruction of the world after the war.

When, at the same time, we know that M. Molotov's talks with President Roosevelt were so satisfactory it adds to the importance of the Treaty which has been signed. For many years some of us in this country have been fighting, hoping and praying for such an outcome, and M. Maisky has played a great and distinguished part in the efforts to bring about better relationships between the two countries. There is no need now for further documents; there can be no doubt in anyone's mind as to the fullness of the co-operation of the two countries for many years to come and the certainty of that co-operation has laid the first foundation-stone for the security of the post-war world and for the realisation of something new and better in a reconstructed Europe.

Before I conclude I should like to say a word about the present phase of the war and as regards the future. There is in this country, and I think throughout the world, a growing feeling that the difficulties of our enemies are increasing and that our own power of resistance and attack is rapidly developing. In some quarters, perhaps, this has led to an exaggerated feeling of optimism, a healthy and encouraging feeling, but one that might become dangerous if it were allowed to go too far. There is no doubt that our situation has greatly improved during the last year. Not only has Russia taken the great weight of the German onslaught, but now with the Soviet Union and America we have resources of manufacture which far outstrip those of our enemies, and which must in the long run, if wisely applied, be decisive of the result.

Nevertheless the power of those enemies is still very great, and there are many months of hard and bitter struggle ahead of us in which we may not be uniformly successful. We shall all of us watch with anxiety, and with hope, the great battles which will take place this summer on the Russian Front as we are watching those in Libya and in the Pacific. We shall do our utmost to help the Soviet Union both with the supply of materials and with the organisation for an offensive effort against Germany in the West, an effort which cannot be launched until the time is ripe. We shall do our utmost to strengthen India, to assist

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Australia and New Zealand and to secure our position in Africa and the Near East.

This list of obligations and commitments is great enough to convince you that victory will only be won by the most sustained and courageous effort by every man and woman in this country.

We may yet have to meet difficulties and reverses and we must steel ourselves to go through those as we have passed through the even greater risks and trials of the last two years. We cannot afford to let up on our efforts for a single moment, and I would appeal especially to you and to all the mining population of our country to give that total support to our war effort which alone can spell victory. Without that victory there can be no realisation of our hopes in the post-war world; but just as we are determined at all costs to win that victory so we must be prepared when the victory is won to continue our efforts and our sacrifices in order to achieve that New Order of our civilisation which will bring comfort, health and happiness to our people.

I cannot now sketch to you in any detail the picture of that post-war world, but it must be a world in which the common people of all countries can exercise their rights with freedom and can achieve that measure of economic justice which they have so long been denied. If, as I believe will be the case, the people of this country are prepared to expend the same energy and effort in the accomplishment of those aims of peace as they have been and are to win victory in war, then I believe that we can create a new world of happiness and peace.

We have learnt during the war the use of many methods and devices by which we can secure that the overriding national interest should prevail in our social and economic life, and we must be prepared to use these same methods and devices in overcoming the many and difficult problems with which the cessation of war will present us.

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